

RIVERSIDE PRESS ENTERPRISE

Southern California leaders call for stronger actions to combat pollution

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By DAVID DANELSKI
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Saying enough is enough, scores of Southern California city and county officials Thursday declared the region's air quality a health crisis and called on Gov. Schwarzenegger and President Bush to take action to help.

The unanimous vote by the 71-member Southern California Association of Governments board was a show of support for air quality officials seeking tougher state and federal measures to combat smog, particularly fine particles. The board is made up of city council members and county supervisors from Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Ventura and Imperial counties.

"You simply have to have the state and federal government do things differently or we are not going to meet the federal (health) standards," said Riverside Mayor Ron Loveridge, a board member. He also serves on the regional and state air-quality agency boards.

Officials from the organization said fine-particle pollution results in about 5,400 premature deaths, 2,400 hospitalizations and almost a million lost work days every year in Southern California.

Regional air-quality regulators have long complained that they are hamstrung because roughly 80 percent of Southern California's pollution comes from cars, trucks, trains, airplanes, ships and heavy construction equipment regulated by the California Air Resources Board or U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District wants tougher state rules and strategies to eliminate about 71 tons of pollution daily, agency spokesman Sam Atwood said. The district, facing a 2015 federal deadline to cut fine-particle pollution to acceptable levels, has pushed for tougher emissions standards for new cars and trucks and programs to add pollution controls to existing cars, he said.

The AQMD also wants the EPA to clamp down on emissions from locomotives and oceangoing ships, he said.

EPA officials could not be reached late Thursday afternoon.

Bill Maile, a spokesman for Schwarzenegger, referred questions to the state Air Resources Board.

Robert F. Sawyer, chairman of the Air Resources Board, said state officials are aggressively working to reduce fine-particle pollution. However, he said his agency and the South Coast district disagree on strategies.

The South Coast district wants reductions in nitrogen oxides -- an ingredient of fine-particle pollution and ozone -- from trucks and other vehicles. The state air board, however, finds it more cost-effective to cut fine-particle pollution from other sources, such as fireplaces and barbecues, he said.

The air board is working with the AQMD to reach an agreement on which strategies are most effective, Sawyer said.